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FREE MAGAZINE



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Celebrate Nutrition Month

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 together antioxidizing free radicals to
 lower the risk of many diseases.

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Briefing Notes on Prescription Drugs

The real cost of free samples

Psst. Hey kid, try one of these. It's really good stuff. Thus goes the standard pitch of the schoolyard pusher, selling the benefits of the product – so to speak – and expanding his market. What he seeks is a happy client who will hopefully come back for more. The hook, as any drug peddler knows, is “The first one's always free.”

And that's how you build a market.

I shouldn't be comparing these tactics to those of the world's major pharmaceutical makers who sell legal and often very valuable products, but there are certain similarities. Drug companies have been using free samples as an essential part of their marketing efforts for decades.

The logic of free samples is quite simple. The manufacturers need to introduce their new product to a market that is usually already crowded. How do you get people to use your product without actually paying doctors to prescribe your drug (which also happens, but more about that later)? Samples, that's how.

The free sample is ubiquitous in many of our physicians' offices where large cupboards store the latest offerings, waiting to be dished out to patients.

The appeal of freebies is obvious: everyone loves something for free, especially those patients who feel good about skipping the pharmacy and saving themselves money. Doctors like satisfied patients and helping out someone who maybe can't afford their drugs probably feels good too.

With all the feel-goodery swirling around drug samples, society seems to act like a kid in a candy store when it comes to applying caution to how they're used. In my opinion, we need to ban or severely restrict the use of free samples.

Of course, the brand name pharmaceutical industry – generic companies don't play the free sample game – would howl in protest were such a ban enacted. The industry would object vigorously, saying that free samples are vital for physicians and patients to become aware of new therapies. They would argue that free samples provide important drugs for the poor. They'd claim that a free sample is a central part of free enterprise and you can't ban businesses from giving away their products. If you start down that road, you'd have to also ban other stuff such as free food samples in grocery store aisles, free wine samples in liquor stores and so on.

That's what they would argue.

What the companies wouldn't say is that the law lets them write off the selling price of the samples, which might be several dollars per pill even if it cost them only pennies to make. And because of this, samples cost governments hundreds of millions of dollars a year in lost income while companies get to feel like good corporate citizens by flooding our doctors with tax-deductible freebies.

The drug companies won't tell you that without free samples most doctors would stop seeing the drug reps altogether and without them their most effective method of talking up their wares to doctors would grind to a halt.

From my perspective, after looking at the issue of free samples for years I'd have to conclude that, on the basis of consumer safety, economics and sustainable drug plan spending, free samples have gotta go. It will be one of those things in the history of medicine – like bloodletting – that we'll look back on with horror at how incompetent we were.

On the basis of safety alone, I think the BC government would be perfectly justified in banning free pharmaceutical samples. In BC, we have an extremely useful computerized database called PharmaNet that helps protect patients from adverse drug reactions.

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if you get it from our local Gonzales Bay pharmacy or from a drugstore in Fort St. John – it still gets recorded in PharmaNet. When you go to pick up that drug, your pharmacist – your best friend when it comes to keeping you safe from drug interactions – will enter it into the system. If there is a potential adverse reaction with any other drug in your profile, they will alert the doctor, possibly asking for a change to the prescription. Call it the “sober second thought” on prescribing.

Free samples, on the other hand, never get entered into PharmaNet so any potential interaction between the new drug and the ones you’re already taking is left unexamined. Not good.

But do samples help get drugs to poor or indigent patients? Drug samples are almost always the newer, more expensive patented drugs about which we know the least. Most guidelines and the majority of reputable sources of prescribing information to doctors will say that “first line” recommended treatments – the first choice of a drug for a particular condition – are older, proven treatments and usually generic drugs. You’ll never find generics among the free samples.

Often, the provincial drug programs won’t cover the newest drug you first took as a sample so when you finally have to go to the pharmacy to pay for it, what happens? Sticker shock, that’s what happens. Free samples are a bust on the economic front because there is a good chance you’ll be started on a drug you eventually have to pay for yourself at a vastly inflated price over what is likely recommended therapy.

This same “first one’s free” rule happens in our hospitals too. The drug companies know that people started on drugs while in hospital will often stay on the same ones when they are discharged so the drug companies often give the hospitals super low prices.

A few years ago, a BC hospital pharmacist told me their hospital had the most expensive anti-heartburn drug, in a class called PPIs or Proton Pump Inhibitors, on their formulary. The drug in the community cost about \$2.50 per pill, but the company was selling them to the hospital at a penny each. And why not, if the principle of the “first one’s free” still is wonderfully profitable?

Which brings me to the final issue, something people ask me about all the time: Do doctors get paid to prescribe certain drugs? I can say this is typically not public knowledge, but we do know that one of the ways drug companies market their drugs is by carrying out what are called “seeding trials.” They will say to a doctor, “Please prescribe our new drug to the next 10 patients and we’ll pay you \$200 per patient.” If your doctor makes an extra \$2,000 to be part of a company’s “research team,” does that seem unreasonable?

Maybe not to the doctor, but to the patient who isn’t told their doctor is being paid to prescribe a particular new drug, it might seem a little dodgy.

Let me leave you with a final bit about the PPIs, which include drugs like Losec, Nexium, Pantoloc or Pariet, all very widely used in people with heartburn or ulcers. These powerful drugs have been commonly prescribed for at least 15 years and like any drug class, as time goes on, more and more adverse effects seem to appear. Health Canada recently issued a warning saying that PPIs can cause diarrhea and may lead to more serious intestinal conditions, including increasing your risk of getting a nasty bug known as *C. difficile*.


PPIs are fabulous at reducing stomach acid, yet like any weapons-grade pharmaceutical they are also capable of causing considerable collateral damage. Last year in the US, the drug watchdog group Worstpills.org, worried about the growing list of dangers associated with PPIs, petitioned the FDA to require black box warnings on the whole class, saying they caused a host of problems including rebound acid hypersecretion – which can cause people to become dependent on the drug – fractures, infections and magnesium deficiency, among other things.

If you’d received a PPI as a free sample, your pharmacist wouldn’t have been able to warn you about any potentially dangerous interaction with dozens of other drugs. And the pharmacist couldn’t have told you that PPIs render some drugs, such as clopidogrel, (Plavix) less potent.

All in all, free samples are bad medicine and they can be a pain in the gut. Avoid them. ◀

Alan Cassels is a drug policy researcher at the University of Victoria and author of the forthcoming book **Seeking Sickness: Medical Screening and the Misguided Hunt for Disease**, due out in April.


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Have fun in the kitchen

The kitchen has traditionally been the heart of the home, a powerful space to generate physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being. – Chef Joseph Forest

Some of us follow recipes to the letter. If directions say to whisk the sauce and we have a fork but no whisk, we turn to another recipe. Others refer to someone else's set of ingredients or directions solely for inspiration, as a jumping off point only, relying on their creativity or sense of adventure. Both approaches can lead to fabulous dining experiences. There's room for all of us in the kitchen, though perhaps not at the same time.

How we approach food preparation can mean we either enjoy creating meals or dread it. For a more satisfying experience in the kitchen, be sure to gather the ingredients and utensils first. If you have ever reached the halfway point in a meal preparation and found you lack one key ingredient, you'll know what we mean. Picture the dilemma: you are halfway through assembling your recipe and find you must drop everything and go to the store. For helpful and inspiring tips to transform your culinary experience, read *Cooking Vegetarian* (J. Forest and V. Melina, Wiley Canada, 2011).

Some people take the time to prepare several big items once or twice a week. This could include a huge salad to store in one or more containers with tight lids, plus several entrees. One could cook several kinds of beans, to have bean salad on hand, or a big pot of lentil soup. When heating a casserole or rice pudding in the oven, add baked potatoes that can be reheated later in the week. You can add to your enjoyment by listening to your favourite music or audio book while you cre-

ate large batches of the foods you love to freeze.

If you want your partner, children or other family members to share in food preparation, make it a pleasant time. While their help may initially be negligible or even make more work for you, over time, the other eaters at your household will be able to make food for themselves and even spell you off in preparing family meals. Here are a few tips for involving children:

Involve your little ones in food selection. This process may prove more successful at a farmer's market, in the garden, or after you've purchased the groceries and got them home, rather than in the middle of the sugar-laden cereal aisle. Children come to enjoy healthy food when they share in the creative process. They love to help, stir, knead, roll, decorate, chop and do just about anything else in the kitchen that they're ready for. Consider their preferences when planning menus and include something they enjoy at each meal.

Keep offering new foods, even if they are rejected. A child who turns up her nose at something one day could adopt it as her favourite a month later. This really does happen. Respect a child's right to dislike a few foods. None of us can be expected to love every food, nor is it necessary for good nutrition.

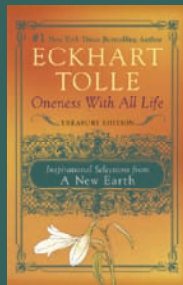
Make mealtime pleasant. Set a pretty table, light a candle (even for breakfast) and encourage positive family interaction. Children are thrilled to drink everyday beverages from wine glasses, even if they came from the thrift store. <

March 3: Meet Vesanto Melina at Nature's Fare in Langley, #120-19880 Langley Bypass 200th St., 10AM-1PM. www.nutrispeak.com

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On the Garden Path Carolyn Herriot

ORGANICS

“Citopia” can feed cities

According to Carolyn Steel, author of *Hungry City: How Food Shapes our Lives*, supplying cities with food is one of the most important issues on the planet. Her TED lecture starts off showing how people living in cities in the past used to feed themselves and what happened when cities expanded. As cities grew, food production – growing vegetables and raising and butchering animals – was moved to the surrounding countryside. Food was then transported into the city via horse-drawn carts or walked in on their own hooves along routes named Cow Street or Corn Row so people no longer saw how food was grown or how animals were treated. (See the TED lecture at <http://compost-it.blogspot.com/2009/10/carolyn-steel-how-food-shapes-our.html>)

Fast forward to 2012 where 60 percent of the world's population now live in cities. For many, this disconnection to food has become a worrying concern. People want to know what they are being fed and how we will all be fed in an uncertain future. Levels of health are deteriorating, leading to the realization there is a vital link between food and good health.

Carolyn Steel has a vision of “Citopia” – a city in which once again food is the ordering principle at the centre of society, where people live in cities that keep them connected to nature. In Citopia, the symbiotic relationship between a city and its surrounding environment is restored and the city looks after the country and the country looks after the city.

Carolyn Steel has a vision of “Citopia” – a city in which once again food is the ordering principle at the centre of society.

What would we need to create “Citopia?” We’d need to develop networks of farmers markets to distribute food to the people. We’d need to fund community projects to bring food back into the city. We’d need to teach food production in schools and educational facilities and plant food on church lands, in public gardens, on rooftops, in allotment gardens, on boulevards and in planter boxes. We’d need to educate people about Regional Environmentally-responsible Agricultural Land use (REAL) food that nourishes people and communities wherever they live. We’d need procurement policies to feed nourishing food to children in schools and to sick people in hospitals. We’d need REAL food in restaurants and at celebratory festivals.

To begin, we need access to open-pollinated seeds, food plants from which seeds can be saved. We cannot achieve “Citopia” without securing the ability to grow food and save seeds. Currently, food seeds around the world are in the control of corporations whose agenda is to feed people using biotech GM methods of food production. Most people I know refer to this as “Frankenfood” and don’t want to eat it. They also want it labelled so they can avoid it. Initiatives like the one in Richmond, California, where a seed lending library has been established is an important step in making food security a reality. (www.nextworldtv.com/page/9099.html)

Today, North American governments are investing huge amounts of taxpayers’ money in biotech research and development, representing the interests of corporations such as Monsanto. The majority of investment is in resource extraction of oil and gas and mining rather than agriculture and secondary manufacturing. Obviously, we need more investment in these sectors to safeguard local economies. ◀

Carolyn Herriot grows Seeds of Victoria at the Garden Path Centre in Victoria, BC, <http://earth-future.com/gardenpath> She is author of *The Zero Mile Diet, a Year-Round Guide to Growing Organic Food* and is currently writing *The Zero-Mile Diet Cookbook* (Harbour Publishing).

LETTERS

Truthful journalism enlightens consumers

I would like to thank *Common Ground* magazine for its truthful journalism and for enlightening the consumer as to the crisis we are facing in the natural health industry. I am very disappointed with all the other health magazines for not taking the initiative to let their readers know how they can help facilitate change and save their access to natural health products. How can the public get involved and express their concerns to their MPs and the Health Minister if they don't know what is going on? And I beg to ask the question "Why are these other magazines not saying anything?" Shame on you. This is why I advertise my products in *Common Ground*. I want to support a magazine that supports our industry.

— Rose Stevens, holistic practitioner, Manitoba.

Dietary supplements never killed anyone so stop killing dietary supplements

An open letter to the Minister of Health

Dear Minister Aglukkaq:

Health Canada has spent over \$1 billion of taxpayers' money doing what doesn't need to be done – licensing vitamins and dietary supplements. How many lives has this huge make-work project saved? Exactly none. Dietary supplements have never killed anyone; zero fatalities in the half-century these products have been available in Canada.

Your zealous Natural Health Products Directorate (NHPD) has restricted tens of thousands of 100 percent safe products from the market by refusing to grant them NPN licences and by subjecting some of us to unreasonable search and sei-



**When the long gun registry is abolished,
how does your government propose to justify
licensing vitamins but not rifles?**

zure, in violation of the Canadian Bill of Rights and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. At its whim, your NHPD is destroying small family businesses and, in the process, arbitrarily depriving Canadians of safe products they use to maintain and improve their health.

Your NHPD proudly declares on its website: "Our role is to ensure that Canadians have ready access to natural products that are safe ... while respecting freedom of choice ..." How do you, Minister, explain this obvious contradiction between professed intention and actual consequences?

Here is a deal breaker: The NHP Regulations are unlawful. They are bureaucratic dictates that have never been sanctioned by Parliament and furthermore contravene the Constitution Act, 1867. The NHPD does not have any legal authority to remove safe products from the market. This game is over. We know our rights.


The Constitution Act, 1867, grants to the Provinces exclusive domain over matters of health. Yet the Provinces have not seen fit to regulate health products. That is because their hospitals have never experienced a single DOA (dead on arrival) from overdosing on vitamins or dietary supplements, nor are there any provincial records documenting these products as a cause of death. The NHPD is doing what doesn't need to be done, is doing so unlawfully and is costing taxpayers a fortune in the process.

When the long gun registry is abolished, how does your government propose to justify licensing vitamins but not rifles? Minister Aglukkaq, you did not create this insanity, but you have the power to stop it. Let reason prevail.

Yours most sincerely,

— Robert K. Jefferson, Dietary Supplement Protective Union, www.dspu.ca

continued p.27...

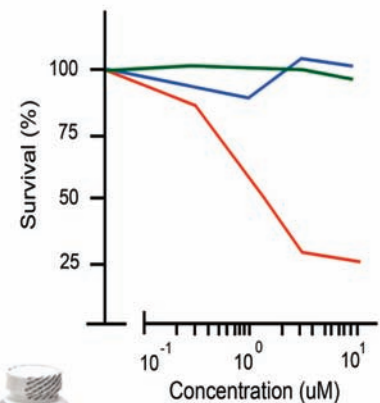


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Undernutrition

The root cause of obesity and disease

Could Canada's younger generations be expected to live shorter lives than their parents because of obesity? It is a chilling thought, but over the last 25 years, Statistics Canada reports have shown a considerable increase in the percentage of children and adolescents who are overweight and obese.

At the root of the obesity problem is something called "undernutrition," a type of silent starvation that occurs when one consistently avoids or does not have access to nutrient-dense food. Your body's storage capacity for carbohydrates is quite limited so when you consume more than you need, they are converted, via insulin, into fat and stored, thus increasing your risk for nearly every chronic degenerative disease. Insulin is useful – it is essentially a storage hormone that helps you store the excess calories from carbohydrates in the form of fat in case of famine. Chronically high blood levels of insulin, however, prevent fat from exiting storage sites to burn as fuel in cellular metabolism. In effect, the obese person is starving on a cellular level and naturally wants to eat more.

Brain imaging (PET scans) show that high-sugar and high-fat foods work just like heroin, opium or morphine in the brain. Both obese people and drug addicts have fewer dopamine receptors, making them more likely to crave things that boost dopamine and that feeling of reward.

Further to this, obesity changes the type of refined carbohydrate you will prefer. One study published in the February 2005 *Journal of Epidemiology*, showed that people with a higher body mass tended to eat car-

bohydrates with a higher glycemic index – foods such as white bread and refined sugars and other foods which cause a quick surge in blood sugar. Interestingly, the amount of carbohydrate consumed in the study made little difference. It was all about the type of carbohydrate consumed. 'Good' carbohydrates such as whole grains, fruits and vegetables do not have high glycemic indexes, and, not surprisingly, did not lead to weight gain.

To arrive at a total systems approach to eradicating obesity, something must be done around educating people about the type of crops that contribute to the very condition they need fixed. In the United States, government subsidies continue to support an agriculture industry that focuses on producing cheap sugar and fats from corn and soy. Both crops fuel obesity. Functional medicine physician Dr. Mark Hyman asks us to consider: "You can fill up on 1,200 calories of cookies or potato chips for \$1, but you'll only get 250 calories from carrots for that same \$1, so if you were hungry, what would you buy?"

Sadly, processed foods have become cheaper as real

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food has become more expensive. The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) reported that between 1985 and 2000 the retail price of carbonated soft drinks rose by 20 percent, fats and oils by 35 percent and sugars and sweets by 46 percent. On the other hand, there was a 118 percent increase in the retail price of fresh fruits and vegetables. In 15 years, the price of vegetables ballooned six times as fast as the cost of sugary, calorie-rich, nutrient-poor sodas.

consumed an extra 500 calories a day when allowed to eat junk food as compared to days when they weren't allowed to eat junk food. They ate more because the food triggered cravings and addiction. Once they started eating processed food full of the sugar, fat and salt that triggered their brain's reward centres, they couldn't stop.

Unfortunately, food manufacturers refuse to release any internal data on how they put ingredients together



photo © Mona Makela

Foods made 'in a plant' (rather than grown on a plant) as Michael Pollan would say, are biologically addictive. Sugar stimulates the brain's reward centres through the neurotransmitter dopamine exactly like other addictive drugs. Brain imaging (PET scans) show that high-sugar and high-fat foods work just like heroin, opium or morphine in the brain. Both obese people and drug addicts have fewer dopamine receptors, making them more likely to crave things that boost dopamine and that feeling of reward. Foods high in fats will also raise opiate-like substances. And just like drugs, after an initial period of "enjoyment," the user starts regularly consuming them to feel normal.

Binge-eating then leads to profound physiological change, which steps up calorie consumption and weight gain. In a Harvard study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, overweight adolescents

to maximize consumption of their food products despite requests from researchers. In his book *The End of Overeating*, David Kessler, MD, the former head of the Food and Drug Administration, describes the science of how food is made into drugs by the creation of hyperpalatable foods that lead to neuro-chemical addiction.

Healthy eating habits at home

The number one piece of advice is don't get hungry, says weight loss and bariatric surgery specialist Dr. Yoni Freedhoff. Research studies show that low blood sugar levels are associated with lower overall blood flow to the brain. This means BAD decisions when you are hungry.

Make sure everyone in your household has a healthy breakfast before going to school or work. Studies repeatedly show eating a *cont'd p.14...*

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... **Nutrition** from p.13

healthy breakfast helps people maintain weight loss.

To keep blood sugar stable, eat a nutritious breakfast with some protein like eggs, protein shake or nut butters. Studies show that low-glycemic meals keep children full and satisfied.

Even 100% fruit juice is like candy. Send your children to school with a bottle of pure water each day. It is far better to provide your family with whole fruit so they feel full and get all the fibre and phytonutrients that juicing and heat pasteurizing takes out. Just one of those “no added sugar” juice boxes contains the equivalent of at least five teaspoons of sugar. Drinking more than 12 ounces a day of 100% fruit juice has been linked to an increased risk of obesity.

Eliminate sodas, all sugars and artificial sweeteners from your diet, as these can trigger cravings.

Avoid flavoured yoghurt. These products are loaded with sucrose and high-fructose corn syrup. Home-made yoghurt costs one-third the price of commercial

yoghurt. Make it yourself; see the recipe at www.cook-for-good.com

Pack vegetables in that lunch bag and go easy on starches. According to data from the Canadian Community Health Survey 2004, 59% of Canadian children and adolescents were reported to consume fruits and vegetables less than five times a day. This group of individuals were significantly more likely to be overweight or obese than were those who ate fruit and vegetables more frequently. Don't fall into the “I'm running late, I'll pack this” trap.

Optimize your nutrient status

Optimize your vitamin D levels: When vitamin D levels are low, the hormone that helps turn off your appetite doesn't work and people feel hungry all the time, no matter how much they eat.

Optimize omega 3s: Low levels of omega-3 fatty acids have also been associated with depression,

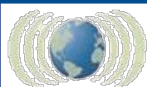
Alzheimer's disease and obesity. EPA especially helps with depression.

Consider natural supplements for cravings control if the problem is severe. Glutamine, tyrosine, 5-HTP are amino acids that help reduce cravings. Stress reducing herbs such as *Rhodiola* can also help. Chromium balances blood sugar and can help take the edge off cravings. Glucomannan fibre is very helpful to reduce the spikes in sugar and insulin that drive cravings and hunger. Otherwise, cutting out sugar cold-turkey and having a little protein at each meal can help to cut cravings. You will notice a difference in three to four days. Always work with a certified holistic nutritionist in making these changes. <

This article has been adapted from the original. **Helen Papaconstantinos** divides her time between her holistic nutrition practice and her various writing projects in the role as research specialist for the Institute of Holistic Nutrition. www.insightfulnutrition.ca

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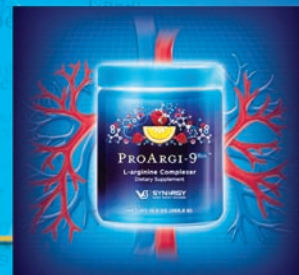
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Our oceans need help

It's been 20 years since Canada's East Coast cod fishery collapsed and we still have no recovery target or timeline for rebuilding populations. That's just one finding in a damning report from a panel of eminent Royal Society of Canada marine scientists. "Sustaining Canada's Marine Biodiversity" notes Canada has "failed to meet most of our national and international commitments to protect marine biodiversity" and "lags behind other modernized nations in almost every aspect of fisheries management."

For a country surrounded on three sides by oceans, with the longest coastline in the world, that's shameful. Successive federal governments have failed to recognize our oceans as much more than reservoirs of resources to exploit for short-term gain. You'd think the decline of the Northern cod fishery, largely caused by mismanagement, would have taught us something.

The Royal Society panel focused on climate change, fisheries and aquaculture... The problem, it found, was not an absence of knowledge, science or policy, but rather "a consistent, disheartening lack of action on well-established knowledge and

Our government is gaining a reputation for ignoring or discounting the advice of scientists. Let's tell our leaders our future depends on the future of the oceans.

best-practice and policies, some of which have been around for years."


Although Canada has made an international commitment to establish a protected network covering 10 percent of our ocean territory, it has protected less than one percent.

In fact, the federal government recently rejected millions of dollars in funding for a collaborative effort to establish a marine spatial plan and network of protected areas in Canada's Pacific North Coast waters. First Nations, industry, government and environmental organizations, including the David Suzuki Foundation, had been making progress on the Pacific North Coast Integrated Management Area (PNCIMA) for years, but the federal government stymied the process by failing to invest adequate funding and by rejecting support from a philanthropic organization.

Its reason? The government was worried marine protected areas and marine use plans based on ecosystem science might restrict oil tanker traffic. The loss of more than \$8 million dollars from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation was a blow to the process and the government has not stepped in to make up for the shortfall.

Rather than protect the Pacific's valuable resources, opportunities, and habitat... it appears the government would rather risk it all by pushing the Northern Gateway pipeline project to ship crude bitumen from the tar sands through precarious Pacific Coast waterways to China and California.

Besides an apparent lack of interest on the part of government regarding the health of Canada's oceans, the report identifies a major problem that puts us behind most developed nations: a "major conflict of interest at Fisheries and Oceans Canada between its mandate to promote industrial and economic activity and its responsibility for conserving marine life and ocean health." The panel offered a number of sensible recommendations, which include addressing the conflict of interest and living up to our commitments to marine biodiversity.

Our government is gaining a reputation for ignoring or discounting the advice of scientists. Let's tell our leaders our future depends on the future of the oceans and this advice must be heeded. The science is clear; it's time to do more. 

Written with contributions from David Suzuki Foundation editorial and communications specialist **Ian Hanington**. Learn more at www.davidsuzuki.org



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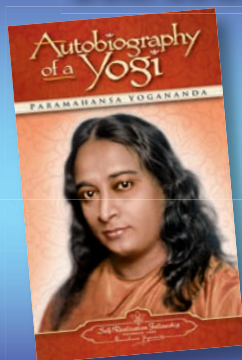
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Just now

an interview with Eckhart Tolle

To read Eckhart Tolle's latest column, please see the current print edition of *Common Ground*. For copyright reasons, we are authorized to publish this column in our print version only.

JR: In your new book, I feel like you're the modern equivalent of the explorers that came to the new world, but an explorer and documenter of consciousness, discovering a new world.

ET: Yes, discovering is the right word. It's not that you need to make a great effort to attain it or bring it about or acquire it. It's discovering it's already there in you – conscious awareness that's obscured, or partially obscured, in many people. It's a discovery of something already there.

It's like waking up after a dream, because identification with the thinking mind and its stories and the old emotional conditioning is like being immersed in a kind of dream world, which very often turns into a nightmare – acting out old conditioned patterns again and again. The whole structure of the egoic mind is an old dysfunction.

There's some evidence that the ego started about 6,000 years ago, but nobody can say for sure. Before that, humans were in a state of innocence. When we go beyond the dysfunction of the ego, we regain our original innocence, but on a much deeper level. This is why Jesus said unless we become as little children we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.

So, returning to the original innocence, and at the same time going much deeper into that with full awareness – that's the process. We're coming out of thousands of years of dreadful suffering, almost the whole of recorded history of humanity. If you really look at it in an unbiased way, as if you'd never seen it before, one cannot but admit that, to a large extent, 80 to 90 percent of it is a history of pathological insanity, the suffering that humans have created for themselves and, of course, inflicting it upon others.

JR: And exporting it through colonization to the new world.

ET: Yes, so the important part of the awakening process is the realization of the insanity in human history, collectively, to this day playing itself out in world events. Also, to be aware of the insanity within oneself – old, dysfunctional patterns that come again and again that create suffering. So when you see that you're insane, then you're not completely insane. Sanity comes the moment you realize the fact of insanity. To see insanity is not a negative thing.

JR: At least you're out of denial.

ET: Yes, that's why in the film *A Beautiful Mind*, for example, which is about a mathematical genius who did have a mental dysfunction, his mind was developed in certain areas but he was also insane. The viewer of the film doesn't know that until a certain point when the character realizes that many of his experiences are delusions. At that moment, his healing begins. He's not cured yet, but his healing begins because he's recognized his own insanity. That recognition can only come out of sanity, which is the awareness of unconditioned consciousness.

JR: I remember you saying before you published your last book that the next one would be about why there isn't peace on this planet. Was finding a solution one of the major intentions of *A New Earth*?

ET: Yes, to see the nature of the major dysfunction. That's why I talk quite a bit about the ego in this book. We need to recognize the nature of the dysfunction. Sometimes, even very great Eastern teachers sometimes neglect that part because they're not really touched by the magnitude of, especially, the Western ego. So it's very important for us to see the dysfunction so that we can recognize it when it arises.

Part of the new book is about recognizing the ego, which I regard as a semi-autonomous energy. It's an energy field. Every thought you think is an energy field. It has a form and then it dissolves and then there is another form. The ego itself is an energy field and it has a collective and individual aspect. Every indi-

vidual ego is part of the collective. They're connected. Every individual is a manifestation of the collective. To recognize that is essential because the ego, being a very clever entity, has many ways of reappearing. Even if you've seen it in one disguise, it can suddenly reappear in a new one.

You might suddenly realize your whole sense of self, identity, is being derived from your possessions and social position. You see that your whole sense of identity is bound up with that and you recognize one aspect of ego. Well, usually it only comes to people when they suffer, when the identification with something no longer works...

It's recognizing the ego in its many disguises. I've met Buddhist monks who had enormous egos without knowing it. I remember being in a monastery afraid to approach them because they seemed so aloof. Yet I've met other Buddhist monks who were like little children and it was a joy to talk to them because they'd laugh and not take themselves seriously at all. They didn't take the whole Buddhist

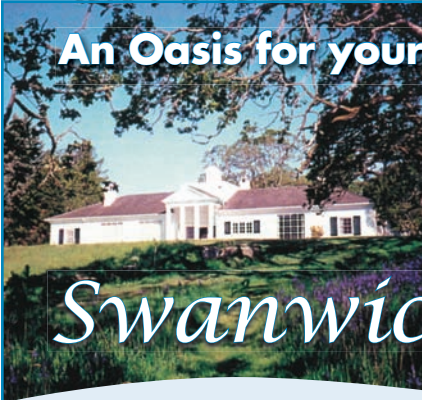



thing seriously either, yet they practised it knowing it was only a form and they weren't identified with it.

There's a dimension in us that has nothing to do with content. Self-realization is that I am not that. I'm not my story, not my grievances and hang-ups, not the story of me that I'm telling other people at parties or repeating in my head again and again. That is only form. It's temporary.

When you see what you're not, it's already liberating. Something inside you breathes a sigh of relief. Then, of course, the mind begins to ask, "What are you if you are not that?" It wants an answer. In other words, it wants some new form. It wants a new thought. There must be a thought that I am. But it doesn't work like that. That's why the great book the Tao Te Ching starts with the line that the Tao that can be spoken of is not the true Tao because Tao – in the ancient Chinese way of putting it – is the formless dimension. You could say pure consciousness, but with any term we use we have to be careful it's not mistaken for "It." Otherwise, the mind comes in and says, "Oh, consciousness, yes. I believe that I'm consciousness." It's not another belief. It's finding that spaciousness inside yourself that's there when you let go of identification of form. ◀

Excerpted from **Just now: a two-part interview with Eckhart Tolle** by Joseph Roberts. Read the full interview online. Go to www.commonground.ca Click on archives. Click on 2007 at the top of the page. For part one, click on September 2007. For part two, click on October 2007.

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The power of poetry

How a few choice words can change worlds within and without

The world appears to be on a knife-edge again, with leaders from Tel Aviv to Tehran playing out idiotic games of brinkmanship better suited to pre-war Europe than the whistle-blowing world of WikiLeaks and Anonymous. To write about poetry in this context may seem faintly ridiculous. And with the planet threatening to blossom into a final exchange of nuclear weapons – or at least a global explosion of resistance to the banksters and robber barons – poetry seems like a pretty insipid thing. What are Wordsworth’s daffodils or Rumi’s singing reed next to a ballistic missile with multiple warheads, or even a riot cop’s truncheon? Not much, it seems.

But can poetry actually change the world for the better, in its own fugitive, hard-to-quantify way?

Unlike journalism, old poems have a way of staying fresh. W.B. Yeats’ short poem *The Second Coming* seems just as appropriate now as when it was written in 1919, in the aftermath of the First World War. With its mysterious imagery of “some rough beast slouching toward Bethlehem,” this old standby of English lit classes conjures up a terrible future brewing in the birthplace of Christ. It also offers the most concise description of collective cynicism ever penned, perfect for the age of Fox News and neutered progressivism: “The best lack all conviction, while the worst/Are full of passionate intensity.”

Yeats managed a living from herding words, but he was a rare bird. According to one estimate, a Canadian author who manages to sell over 700 volumes of verse can be considered a successful poet. Clearly, rhyme doesn’t pay. T.S. Eliot kept his day job at the bank, Wallace Stevens sold insurance and Ogden Nash once observed, “Poets aren’t very useful. / Because they aren’t consumeful or very produceful.”

Today, we tend to think of poets as quaint figures, wandering lonely as a cloud from their day jobs to the open mike. We normally don’t think of their efforts as world changing or life altering, although we give grudging respect to a few dead, white versifiers (mostly Shakespeare and a few romantic poets). Yet poetry has its place in the world, even if it’s shoehorned into tweets.

Personally, I can’t exactly say poetry changed my life, but there was a time when it definitely helped me cope. A little over a decade ago, I fell into a deep depression that lasted about a year. There were days were I would sit for hours on the couch, doing nothing but staring at the floor. During this purgatorial period, the opening passage from Dante’s *Inferno* became a touchstone for me.

“Midway upon the journey of our life / I found myself within a forest dark, / For the straight forward pathway had been lost.”

I would often listen to an album by singer Marianne Faithfull that opened with this recitation of Dante and

ended with lines from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. Hearing her nicotine-ravaged voice recite this college curriculum verse, I found a strange sense of solace, knowing my suffering was not unique. Although I had little interest in the company of others at the time, and even less in my own, I felt less alone listening to this recitation of mythically charged words.

Like many others, I had admired a few well-known poems from my college days, in the same way you admire delicate museum pieces protected behind glass. But these words were like a salve I could apply to a wound. I believe I escaped from clinical depression partly with the help of poetry, which came without a doctor’s prescription or negative side effects.

British novelist Jeanette Winterson tells of a similar effect from a single line of poetry she read when she was 16-years-old. She was in a library looking for a book for her adoptive mother, who was a fan of murder mysteries. She selected T.S. Eliot’s *Murder in the Cathedral*. “So I opened it and discovered it was written in verse,” she told Eleanor Wachtel on the CBC Radio series, *Writers & Company*. “The first thing I read was a line in it where Eliot says ‘This is one moment, but know that another will pierce you with a sudden painful joy.’ And it made me cry because I was having a terrible time. I had fallen in love with a girl... It was like a message in a bottle... I didn’t know who this T. S. Eliot person was... It seemed a powerful message to me and something I could hold on to.” This was Winterson’s beginning as a writer.

In the beginning was the word, according to the Bible. To the Stoic philosophers of ancient Greece, the “Logos” – a word connoting language, speech or reason – was the divine animating principle that pervaded the Universe. The Roman poet Lucretius had a different idea. In his long poem, *On the Nature of Things*, he rejected the idea of a universe controlled by gods and proposed instead that matter is made up of tiny particles in constant motion, colliding and combining to weave the world around us. Amazingly, atomic theory originated from the most unlikely source: a ream of verse by an ancient poet.



Lucretius was widely read after his rediscovery during the Renaissance and his ideas contributed to the Enlightenment’s clockwork model of the universe – an idea of great power until its deconstruction at the hands of Einstein, Bohr and Heisenberg in the 20th century. And once again, the poets preceded the scientists. The romantic poets of the 19th century didn’t just reject determinism; they also refuted the utilitarian viewpoint of human beings as replaceable factory widgets. In the late 1800s, Percy Bysshe Shelley and William Blake were among the first to write against social injustice, with the latter poetically slamming child labour and the “satanic mills” of the industrial revolution.

“Poetry is tremendously influential,” notes respected British moral philosopher Mary Midgley in an interview in *The Guardian*. “...Some scientist dismissed Shelley as a beautiful but ineffectual angel standing in the void in vain or something, but, in fact, that revolutionary stuff was enormously influential. His conception of society and how it required equality and how bad it was, and his kind of atheism were very impressive stuff.”

“Writers are the unacknowledged legislators of the world,” Shelley insisted. To put it another way, scribblers are sensitive seismographic instruments. They anticipate seismic social trends long before the journalists, politicians and policy makers. And for their part, political leaders have often appealed to poetry to give mythic power to their initiatives. The opening lines of the American *Declaration of Independence* were written in iambic pentameter:

*We hold these truths to be self-evident:
That all men are created equal,
That they are endowed by their Creator
with certain inalienable rights;
that among these are life, liberty
and the pursuit of happiness.*

Similarly, Martin Luther King Jr.'s enormously influential and stirring "I Have a Dream" speech succeeded because its poetic structure was of a piece with King's delivery. The Baptist minister's electrifying call for equality, which drew its prophetic power from the language of the Gospels, became engrained into the consciousness of the civil rights movement and mainstream society.

After the First World War, the poems of Wilfred Owen, Rupert Brooke and Siegfried Sassoon not only voiced a generational horror of the insanity of war, but they also found their way into classroom curricula in the English-speaking world. Percolating in the minds of young students, they undoubtedly had an influence on the pacifist movement and even the sixties revolution. W.B. Yeats' 1919 poem, *An Irish Airman Foresees His Death*, records the last thoughts of a man whose sense of duty lies outside the officially drawn lines of battle:

*Those that I fight I do not hate,
Those that I guard I do not love;
My country is Kiltartan Cross,
My countrymen Kiltartan's poor...*

The airman's people will remain poor no matter what the war's outcome, Yeats implies, with the victors always being the rich. In a similar vein, Randall Jarrell's *The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner* has stuck in my mind ever since I first encountered it in high school. This five-line 1945 poem concerns the death of a gunner in a World War II American bomber aircraft:

*From my mother's sleep I fell into the State,
And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.
Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life,
I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.
When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.*

This is hard stuff, without a trace of sentimentality. So it's no surprise the relationship of poets to powerbrokers has often been ambivalent. In February 2003, then First Lady Laura Bush cancelled her symposium on "Poetry and the American Voice" after she discovered that some of the poets on her guest list refused to attend in protest against the impending war on Iraq.

In November of last year, Robert Hass, former Poet Laureate of the United States, was present at Occupy Berkeley when Alameda County deputy sheriffs "in Darth Vader riot gear" pushed his wife to the ground and clubbed Hass. "One of my colleagues, also a poet, Geoffrey O'Brien, had a broken rib. Another colleague, Celeste Langan, a Wordsworth scholar, got dragged across the grass by her hair when she presented herself for arrest," Hass recalled in an essay for the *New York Times*. The incident led to at least one memorable protest sign – "Beat Poets, not beat poets."

In other parts of the world, poets have long had the ear of the people and the nervous attention of leaders. The Nobel Prize-winning Chilean poet Pablo Neruda was a diplomat and a senator. In Cuba, you will find few statues of Fidel Castro, but you'll find plenty dedicated to José Martí, the 19th century Havana-born poet whose writings and political struggle were enormously influential in the Cuban struggle for independence.

"In France, Paul Éluard, René Char and Robert Desnos wrote dissenting poetry while fighting for the *Résistance*," notes poet Rachel Galvin. "In Italy, Quasimodo and Cesare Pavese were repressed for denouncing the regime under which they lived, as were Russian and Polish poets such as Osip Mandelstam, Anna Akhmatova, Wislawa Szymborska and Czeslaw Milosz."

"Contemporary Middle Eastern poets such as Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, Nizar Qabbani, Adonis, Ghazi al-Gosaibi and Mahmoud Darwish have embraced the idea of committed literature, or a literature engagée, as Sartre termed it."



**The closest spiritual comparison to
Yeats on bookstore shelves today is
a hot-selling 13th-century Persian
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of the Ancient Persian Empire,
in what is now Afghanistan.
To say Jelaluddin Rumi was
prolific is putting it mildly.**

And, of course, poetry has long accompanied music. John Lennon's piece of chanting doggerel, *Give Peace a Chance*, has been a protest standard for years and his *Imagine* is still rotated on AM radio like it's just another boy-meets-girl bauble, when it's actually a radical hymn to a world freed of possessions, borders and religious dogma. Throughout the sixties to the present, Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen and a host of other poetic singer-songwriters also expanded the protestor's time-specific complaints into calls for universal justice.

Even the Irish nationalist Yeats has become a resource for singer/songwriters a half-century after his death – not what you'd expect of a man who was tone-deaf. Both Sinéad O'Connor and U2 have cribbed lines from Yeats in their compositions, although when Van Morrison converted *Crazy Jane on God* in its entirety into song, the W. B. Yeats estate refused permission, resulting in the destruction of the first pressings of Morrison's 1985 album, *A Sense of Wonder*. (Yeats' family believed the master's compositions should only be set to classical music.)

For some reason, The Waterboys had more success

with Yeats than the "Belfast Cowboy" did. Waterboys singer/songwriter Mike Scott has referenced Yeats throughout his song catalogue and in November of 2011 he went the whole hog with a superb reworking of the poet's verse in *An Appointment With Mr. Yeats*. "September 1913 was written about 100 years ago about the money-grabbing clergy of the day and the bourgeoisie who were very unsympathetic to the plight of the Dublin workers," said Scott in an online interview, discussing his remaking of one particular poem. "If Yeats were around today, I think he would have found much fuel for a similar emotive fire."

The closest spiritual comparison to Yeats on bookstore shelves today is a hot-selling 13th-century Persian mystic, born in the eastern part of the Ancient Persian Empire, in what is now Afghanistan. To say Jelaluddin Rumi was prolific is putting it mildly. One of his works consists of 24,000 verses, making him an inexhaustible resource for his chief translator, the American poet Coleman Barks.

Rumi drew little distinction between love for another, love for the world and love for the universal force behind the realm of appearances. The Sufi poet's words offer a counterweight to the popular image of the fanatical Islamicist, and his expansive idea of the divine offers a challenge to a western culture addicted to dualisms: good/evil, freedom/slavery, God/Satan, inner/outer and democracy/any place without a McDonalds. Rumi writes of a creator who traffics in paradox and the inversion of values that happens when people are convinced of their own righteousness:

*God has allowed some magical reversal to occur,
so that you see the scorpion pit
as an object of desire,
and all the beautiful expanse around it,
as dangerous and swarming with snakes.*

*This is how strange your fear of death
and emptiness is, and how perverse
the attachment to what you want.*

Although it's unlikely any Persian poets will end up on the reading list of West Point cadets, a 2002 *Time* magazine article pegged Rumi as the greatest selling poet in the US at the time (a quick check on Amazon shows a sales rank of 2,457 for *The Essential Rumi*, compared to 57,424 for *The Poetry of Robert Frost*). And as I noted above, Yeats is having a second life in a rock n' roll format. Rap artists like the Afro-Peruvian Immortal Technique are widening their genre to fuse class analysis with scathing word play. There's even a poetic angle to the Occupy movement with its 'mike check' routine, which pushes speakers toward the rhythm and cadence of verse.

As long as there are human beings communicating their truths of soul, self and social justice, poetry will continue to work its subterranean way through human hearts. Let's hope that sonnets prevail over insanity.

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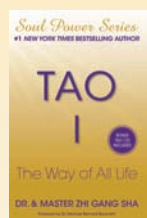
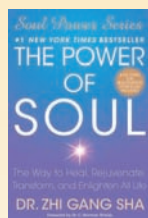
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“What you think of me is none of my business.” — Terry Cole-Whittaker

It is amazing when we stop to think how much of our culture is based on what people think of us or more importantly what we *think* they think of us or what we *want* them to think of us. Fashion magazines, beauty products, cosmetic surgery, automobiles, brands of beer, computers and cell phones — all are marketed with an eye to help us look better to the world around us. This is all pretty superficial.

A deeper aspect of the problem comes when the concern for what others think is not based on our appearance or on what we have, but rather on who we are. We are driven to speak and act in ways that will garner the approval of others. The fear is that if we show who we really are, we will be criticized, rejected or diminished in the eyes of others.

This all starts in childhood, particularly in school. Very young children have a Garden of Eden type of naked innocence. They are all about *being* and do not even have a concept of what others think. It is only when others begin to criticize, judge or make fun of them that they begin to feel the need to cover up their real self, or at least aspects of it.

*If we are to evolve as individuals and as a species,
we need to place a higher value on independent
thinking and speaking our truth.*

Many years ago when I was a new teacher of a grade two class, I was puzzled by the fact the children followed their answers with a question mark. When asked, “What colour is the sky?” they would respond “Blue?” They already knew there was a difference between the truth of which they were quite sure and the ‘right’ answer the teacher was seeking.

When I first entered graduate school, there was one professor I challenged in class a few times. One of my classmates took me aside and told me if I kept doing that I would get a poor mark in the class. I must have been quite naive as this information shocked me.

In my practice, I see many people who just ‘keep quiet’ about things that bother them because they do not want to make waves, create conflict or risk offending others by disagreeing. Interestingly, it is often people who are mature and wise who feel this way. The unwise and immature seem to have no problem speaking up. I like to point out that, if the ones who see a situation from a wise or more evolved standpoint keep quiet, life aligns with the lowest common denominator.

If we set our course according to the opinions of others, it is not really our authentic path. We are like an animal in a cage, restricting ourselves by the boundaries we have set, assuming that only within those confines can we be accepted and liked.

If we are to evolve as individuals and as a species, we need to place a higher value on independent thinking and speaking our truth. We must not be afraid to model a higher path, to demonstrate moral leadership, whether or not others follow.

Our truth can be spoken quietly, in a gentle, non-confrontational way. If someone chooses to judge or reject us for it, they do not value our authenticity. In any case, as friend and author Alan Cohen once said, “If you have never been crucified, you have never done anything worthwhile.” Wise words that can allow us to embrace our crucifixions throughout our lives. **4**

Gwen Randall-Young is an author and psychotherapist in private practice. For articles and information about her books, CDs and the new “Creating Healthy Relationships” series, visit www.gwen.ca See display ad this issue.

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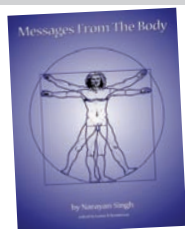


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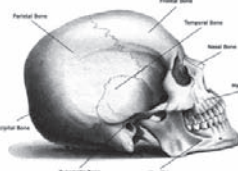
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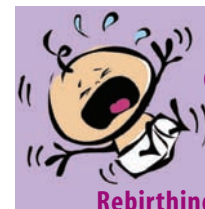
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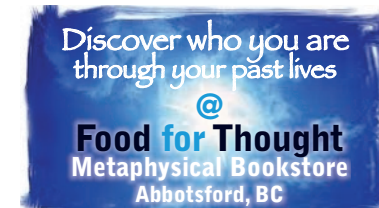
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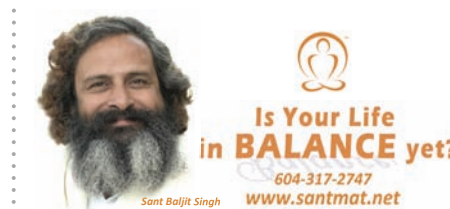
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LETTERS from p.11

Smart meter blitzkrieg

A blitzkrieg is underway, but this time, instead of German Panzer tanks, it's with trucks loaded with "smart meters." The gang that hijacked BC Hydro is in a panic to get them installed before you know what hit you. Your



Our problem is we still think we own BC Hydro and someone will fix this problem for us. We don't and they won't.

rates will double or more; your activities can be monitored on an unprecedented scale and your family just might get cancer or another disease from an exponential increase in poorly understood microwave frequencies.

The big advantage that BC Hydro has is our trusting nature. I encourage you, fellow citizens, to examine this

"smart meter" program in detail. It cannot withstand the scrutiny of the light of day. Question everything, especially Hydro's safety claims and its reliance on Health Canada's bogus "weight of evidence" research. This program represents a potential risk to human, animal and environmental health on a spectacular scale. It has not been proven safe.

Our problem is we still think we own BC Hydro and someone will fix this problem for us. We don't and they won't. Wake up. BC Hydro is proceeding on the assumption it owns us and we're about to be harvested.

– Ron McNutt, Maple Ridge, BC.

BC Hydro spouts lies and half-truths

It is truly mind-boggling that proponents of the smart meter program continue to recite BC Hydro's deceptive misinformation and half-truths. A little research is all that is needed to reveal Hydro's supposed "facts" as nonsense in terms of electromagnetic fields (EMF) and potential health issues related to constant exposure to smart meters. BC Hydro and the BC Liberals have absolutely no right to say the meters are safe. For many years, those studies that are not flawed or tainted by conflict of interest have shown

unequivocally that EMFs damage DNA at levels well below the current standards, which, particularly in Canada, are woefully inadequate. Independent environmental and electromagnetic fields consultants have found that smart meters pulse far more often than BC Hydro claims. In addition, there is evidence to suggest the peak pulses are far greater in intensity than the "average pulse" Hydro owns up to.

Political arrogance and indifference are becoming an epidemic where elected officials abuse their power and are in open betrayal of their citizens. The smart meter program is a deal that was done behind the scenes, without public consultation and without review

by the BC Utilities Commission. The public deserves to know the true cost of this undemocratic, dangerous program. This issue goes way beyond just another tax; it involves personal health, privacy, data security, over-billing, fire safety, job loss and the waste of taxpayers' money. No one who is aware of smart meters and who has done his homework wants one.

No more rolling over; enough is enough. BC Liberals and BC Hydro have made a serious mistake and whether they know it yet or not, they soon will. Their ignorance and arrogance go hand in hand.

– Diana Gostling, North Vancouver, BC.

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March 2012

OUR GREAT NATION came into existence on July 1, 1867. The planetary positions on that day portray what we're all about. Our strengths and weaknesses stand out clearly and our national or collective karma can be read by those that have learned the language of the stars. Obviously, we have a good horoscope as witnessed by the comfortable lifestyles of most Canadians. Yes, we have our flaws, but mainly we have it made. We are a benign, humanitarian people, for the most part tolerant and permissive, with a tendency to treat others fairly.

On the surface, most would agree with this assessment, but when we dig a little deeper the story sadly changes. I was born in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, or as the locals called it, "Pa took it." Pa took this land from its aboriginal people and according to the annals of history, they have no intention of giving it back or sharing it in a fair and equitable way. Now, we're talking pipelines across the land and oil tankers in our pristine waters and we know the inevitable results.

Presently, the planet Pluto is having a major effect on our collective birth chart and will continue to bring massive changes in the next few years. Pluto is not a light, airy-fairy planet and it rules the underworld in all of its variegated colours, shapes and forms. We've heard the term 'Plutocrat,' referring to the powerful and wealthy movers



ARIES Mar 21 - Apr 19

It's a new day and new way as the Aries new moon takes hold on March 22. Significant changes and challenges are taking shape. Epiphanies, revelations and a few surprises keep you on your toes. Cast away fear and move into the future.



TAURUS Apr 20 - May 21

Love is in the air as Venus visits Taurus throughout the month. A lively and exciting time is to be expected. Travel plans congeal and luck seems to have come your way. Move forward with confidence, as others are receptive to your energy now.



GEMINI May 22 - Jun 20

Wrap it up and put away the past as the future is fast approaching. March is a time of preparation. It would behoove you to move towards your goals or at least prepare to do so. The next several months bring grace and abundance.



CANCER Jun 21 - Jul 22

It's a time of joining up, mixing and mingling. A new circle of friends may materialize. Social and professional connections become enhanced as others vie for your attention and possibly your affection. A time of resurgence has arrived. Make the best of it.



LEO Jul 23 - Aug 22

The benefic planets Venus and Jupiter dominate the top of your chart throughout the month, bringing all kinds of opportunities for advancement, acknowledgement and achievement. Watch for biting off too much, though. You may be hungry for some new adventures.



VIRGO Aug 23 - Sep 22

Mars the warlord continues his lengthy visit to your sign. Best use the energy rather than be used by it. Action, exertion, effort, trial, travails, stormy weather, blood, sweat and tears all mixed together may bring success and honour. Good times prevail as well.

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and shakers in our midst. Pluto rules all those interested in controlling our lives. Big business, governments, all policing agencies and the underworld are areas where you are most likely to encounter Plutonian types.

Transiting Pluto opposes the sun, moon and Uranus in our collective birth chart for the next couple of years. Pluto brings destruction, decay, deterioration and all things on the dark side. He is another form of Lord Shiva the destroyer in the Hindu belief system. Yes, Pluto destroys, but it destroys for the sake of renewal and rebirth. Our legal system is in tatters and our medical and educational systems are burdened with the weight of their concerns.

Now, our prime minister is tampering with our Old Age Security benefits as he hints at bumping up the date of eligibility from 65 to 67. I wonder if he knows the ramifications of messing with the up-and-coming baby boomers' pensions. This could be his Waterloo. Pluto passes over his Saturn throughout 2012 and Saturn rules the elderly and their security. The combination of planetary forces could very well spell the demise of Harper's leadership. The fat cat politicians' pensions are golden and ridiculously high. Harper might want to review his plans lest he awaken the sleeping giant. There will be many battles fought in order to bring justice and fairness our way. 



LIBRA Sep 23 - Oct 22

Saturn the stern taskmaster is still around for several more months. He brings deep and powerful lessons that carve wisdom into our souls. Mercury and Uranus send dynamic energy throughout the month making life hectic, challenging and very exciting. It's all a bit edgy.



SCORPIO Oct 23 - Nov 21

Mars and Pluto – co/rulers of Scorpio – send good energy indicating you can get things done. Venus and Jupiter cast excellent energy as they light up the area of relationships and partnerships throughout the month. A lucky break regarding contentious issues brings relief.



SAGITTARIUS Nov 22 - Dec 21

The new moon on March 22 fires up your imagination. You might have a head-full of potent ideas and plans for the future. Venus and Jupiter move through your health sector indicating a time of re-evaluation regarding everything: work, diet, stress, etc.



CAPRICORN Dec 22 - Jan 19

The words “float like a butterfly, sting like a bee” came from beloved Capricorn Muhammad Ali. It is a time of great movement and transition and Ali's words of wisdom may come in handy. The stars lean in your favour. Make the best of it.



AQUARIUS Jan 20 - Feb 19

The fourth solar sector represents your home and your deeper internal self. Now, Venus and Jupiter are moving through that area and a renewal process may begin regarding all aspects of the self, home and family. Creative energy is high throughout the month.



PISCES Feb 20 - Mar 20

A new day dawns as Neptune begins his journey through Pisces. Stay open and perceptive, as the signals from this planet will come clear for those who are clean and sober. Artistic, compassionate and creative energies abound. Spread your wings and catch the wind.

Mac McLaughlin has been a practising, professional astrologer for more than four decades. His popular **Straight Stars** column ran in Vancouver's largest weekly newspaper for 11 years. Email mac@macsstars.com or call 604-731-1109



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Gateway Pipeline pros and cons

An interview with retired economist Reimar Kroecher

by Joseph Roberts

At press time on February 24, the Calgary Herald published an article by Rebecca Penty entitled "Transport Canada approves Enbridge's supertanker routes." Penty notes: "The federal department determined three shipping routes proposed by Enbridge are 'appropriate' and contain no obstructions for the 250 oil tankers the company expects would frequent the terminal each year; to take away some 30 million tonnes of crude annually. A quarter of those tankers would weigh 320,000 tonnes, three times larger than any vessels to have visited Kitimat Harbour since the 1950s."

Joseph Roberts: Both Enbridge and the federal government are strong proponents of this pipeline, claiming that it is essential for Canada's economic future. How many jobs will this pipeline create?

Reimar Kroecher: This pipeline will create new jobs and it will destroy old jobs. According to estimates, it will create approximately 3,000 temporary jobs during the construction phase and 100 permanent jobs after construction is completed. However, the increased oil exports will appreciate the Canadian dollar and there will be job losses in both the manufacturing and retail sectors. A good example of this is the Canadian film industry, which is already on the decline because of our strong petro dollar. A five-cent premium on the Canadian dollar would finish off our film industry.

JR: When exports of hydrocarbons appreciate a country's currency, isn't that referred to as the Dutch disease?

RK: That is correct. When the Dutch increased their export of hydrocarbons, the guilder appreciated, leading to substantial job losses in Dutch manufacturing. In addition, the Dutch travelled to neighbouring Germany and did their shopping there. Norway's experience was similar. The Norwegians travelled to Sweden and Denmark.

JR: With a three or four-cent premium on the Canadian dollar, Canadians will head south to do their shopping – with job losses in Canadian retailing.

RK: Ironically, there will be job gains in all the US border states. In a 2009 study, Michel Beine, Charles S. Bos and Serge Coulombe of Luxembourg, Amsterdam and Ottawa universities, respectively, estimated that 42% of the 340,000 Canadian manufacturing jobs lost during the last decade were due to our rising petro currency. To my knowledge, there are no studies about job losses in the Canadian retail industry. These studies are badly needed, but they would have to be peer reviewed. And we would have to know who paid for these studies because, unfortunately, in today's world the results of studies often depend on who paid for them.

JR: Do we know by how much the loonie would rise if the Northern Gateway pipeline were built?

RK: That is a very complex question. We need studies on that as well. We also must bear in mind that Kinder Morgan has applied for permission to more than double the capacity of its Alberta Tar Sands pipeline to Burnaby, BC. Most of this oil is supposed to be exported in large

Suez type tankers. The Second Narrows channel would have to be dredged to accommodate these huge tankers. This pipeline would deliver almost as much oil to the west coast as the Northern Gateway pipeline is proposed to deliver to Kitimat. In addition, the Keystone pipeline to the US will likely be back on the table after the US election. Most analysts agree that we already have a petro currency, which rises and falls with the price of oil and the volume of oil exported. If these pipelines are built, we will definitely have a petro currency par excellence, and the rise in the loonie will be substantial.

JR: Does eastern Canada still import most of its oil from the Middle East and Venezuela?

RK: Yes, although it gets some from its own wells and some from the pipeline from Alberta to Sarnia. Twenty-years-ago, Canada imported about as much oil as it exported, but with the rise of the Tar Sands, exports



42% of the 340,000 Canadian manufacturing jobs lost during the last decade were due to our rising petro currency.

have taken off and we now export about two barrels for every one barrel imported. This surge in exports is largely responsible for the rise in the Canadian dollar.

JR: It would seem to make sense to increase the capacity of the pipeline to Sarnia and to free eastern Canada from its dependence on imported oil. This would probably create more jobs, especially if the oil were refined in Canada. So why is this not on the table?

RK: I fully agree, especially since this would provide Eastern Canada with energy security. I suspect it is not on the table because the oil companies can make more money faster by exporting unprocessed bitumen to Asia.

JR: Do you agree with the environmental groups who have labelled the Northern Gateway pipeline an environmental disaster of epic proportions waiting to happen?

RK: I certainly agree – not only an environmental disaster, but also an economic disaster. The BC portion of the pipeline runs through earthquake country. It crosses hundreds of streams including the Fraser and the Stikine, two of the world's great salmon rivers. Even without earthquakes, between 1999 and 2008 Enbridge had 610 leaks, spilling 21 million litres of oil. Some of these spills were quite large, like the recent three-million-litre spill into the Kalama River in the US. In Kitimat, the bitumen would be loaded on to tankers much larger than the Exxon Valdez. These vessels then move along narrow channels known for strong winds, strong tides and dense fog, with many

sharp turns, for a distance of 140 kilometres to open water. This would be two-way traffic: tankers going in with natural gas condensate and tankers going out with tar sand oil. In addition, there will be all the marine traffic going to and from the smelter in Kitimat.

Once in the Queen Charlotte basin, these tankers have to cope with severe winter storms. According to the Royal Society of Canada, "Winter wind speeds average 35 kilometre per hour with gusts up to 200 kilometres. Monster waves of more than 25 meters may occur during severe winter storms." In 1949, Canada's largest historic earthquake occurred here (8.1 on the Richter scale) According to Natural Resources Canada, "On Queen Charlotte Island, the shaking was so severe that cows were knocked off their feet and a geologist working there could not stand up. In nearby Terrace, cars were bounced around and walking on the street was described like being on a heaving deck of a ship at sea. Further south, the Juan de Fuca and North American Plates are currently locked. There is good evidence that some time in the future these plates will snap loose generating a huge subsuction quake similar to the 1964 Alaska Quake. During that quake, the docks in Valdez harbour collapsed." Port Alberni was hit by a tidal wave, depositing ships in the downtown core.

JR: Sounds like we have learned nothing from Japan's Fukushima experience, where Japanese industry and government were assuring the public that nuclear plants would be safe and secure in severe earthquake zones.

RK: That seems to be true. I would like to make a final point. What is good for the ecology is also good for the economy. What is bad for the ecology is also bad for the economy. We do not have to choose between something that is good for the economy and bad for the ecology. To argue that these pipelines are good for the economy and bad for the ecology is missing the point. Even if, by the grace of God, there were no spills, burning these hydrocarbons accelerates global warming. Ocean levels rise and millions of acres of fertile, productive land are lost. The cost of rebuilding entire cities, port facilities, highways and railways, etc. will be astronomical. It is much less expensive to prevent global warming than to deal with its consequences.

As Susan Riley, columnist for the *Ottawa Citizen*, so poignantly put it: "Pipeline opponents will win only if Canadians, en masse, rally to defend their beautiful, blessed country rather than stepping politely aside while it is plundered again for short-term gain."

Canadians are waking up; an unprecedented 4,500 of them have signed up as official interveners at the NEB hearings on the Northern Gateway pipeline. It is a classic David vs. Goliath battle – citizens against big oil; citizens against their own government.

Reimar Kroecher taught Economics at Langara College for over 30 years. For more information, visit the website: www.dogwoodinitiative.org

When greed meets green

Just so we are clear, I love the planet and believe we are fast destroying it. I believe that debating global warming is a brilliant piece of sleight-of-hand by business. We used to just call it pollution and it was clearly bad; now they've got us debating global warming while we continue to rape the land and foul the oceans worse than ever. But when the government decides to tell you what you can and can't do, based on what is best for you, we have entered into what the British call the "nanny state." Those in favour of this approach to governing will cite tobacco regulations as an example of this being a reasonable approach (though smokers might disagree).



Who do you trust?

If we were able to actually trust the government, this might be a valid argument. But the fact is that, like science, the government has been co-opted by business. And the military serves government/business by fulfilling the function of resource extraction from other countries. Not much different now than it was during the Roman Empire (our philosophical forefathers). If you disagree with this belief, you may as well stop reading now; if you have a healthy disdain for those in power, please continue. There was a time when the medical profession encouraged smoking as a safe and healthy pastime and the government of America ensured soldiers at war were provided with tobacco, both for the benefits it offered – dealing with insane levels of stress – and for the handy pocket reminder of what they were fighting for: home and freedom.

Now, we have medical and government officials telling us EMFs from cell phone towers, wireless networks, etc, are safe enough to expose our children to them. The level of concern from those supposedly protecting our health is so low I see cell phone towers put on top of apartment buildings designed for seniors and the disabled, just to pick up a few extra bucks. And with no concern for how this might affect those weakened individuals who would be most susceptible to problems caused by EMF (electro-magnetic field) exposure. Wireless networks are in schools and parents can't do anything about the fact that undeveloped brains are constantly exposed to electro-magnetic fields.

"Green" for whom?

Now the business/government model has a new paradigm to use to manipulate us (the "market"). They have the "green" movement, which was easily co-opted since it is a meme that engenders extreme emotions. Since most of us want to save the planet, obviously anything green must be good and if it is good and we are too stupid to do what's "right," right away, sometimes



Now that the green movement has been co-opted by industry, it is used as a mandate to push forward profit-making agendas without anyone actually looking at the full picture.

the government just has to step in and make us do what they know is best. They know it is best because a lobbyist told them so and provided them with the "evidence" they need for the press releases.

Green bulbs and smart meters, oh my

Case in point: "green" light bulbs and "smart-meters" for recording electrical usage. The "green" bulbs save energy. That is their claim to fame and their one advantage. Yet for those of us in the temperate to cold zones, the energy saved from the light bulb will have to be replaced with an identical thermal unit of energy acquired from conventional heating sources. So the green light bulb is really only of value, from an energy perspective, in warm and hot areas, and in the summer for the rest of us. The problem with these bulbs according to critics is threefold. They put out high levels of ultraviolet radiation, enough to damage the skin if you sit too close to them, unless they are "shielded," which appears as a cover over the familiar spiral shape. These bulbs also emit huge amounts of EMFs, which tend to have the strongest negative effect on people who are already ill, those with compromised immune systems and those with electro-magnetic sensitivities. The effects of high EMFs are also very damaging to those with neurological diseases such as ALS, Parkin-

son's disease, multiple sclerosis, severe autism and those with mercury toxicity. These people are the canaries in the coal mine. They are our early warning system and they are treated like hypochondriacs.


Is mercury now green?

If these green bulbs break, they release a toxic amount of mercury and one must follow hazardous material clean-up protocols. Mercury is not very green, is it? Yet someone decided for you that saving energy outweighs dumping more mercury into the environment because ultimately they are headed for the landfill. They decided this and then they mandated it so that incandescent bulbs have been outlawed at the higher wattage levels. Eventually, they will all be outlawed, varying somewhat based on where you live. This is an example of General Electric lobbyists starting this ball rolling in the US, with Canada following suit like a good lapdog, a position we seem to be happy with.

"Smart" for whom?

The so-called "smart-meters" are a great cost saver for the electric company, in part because they can lay off many workers who used to do the job of collecting data from each home. Many people are worried about yet another electro-magnetic field running through their homes 24/7 and I've seen video footage of one in California where all the plant material around it had died. Do you have a choice in this matter? No. They will be installed in every home unless you want to pay thousands of dollars to have yours relocated.

Freedom of choice

Where does personal choice come in and to what point are you comfortable with the government telling you what is good for you and that you have no options? After all, historically, the government's track record is not that good. Our government is still paying reparations and making apologies to races they abused in the past. In hindsight, governments are not ever very trustworthy, as the best interests they have at heart are not those of its commoners. Now that the green movement has been co-opted by industry, it is used as a mandate to push forward profit-making agendas without anyone actually looking at the full picture or at the possible downsides to these new technologies. I suggest we continue to question authority and demand from our politicians the right to personal choice. 

Ken Peters has been a nutritional consultant for more than 20 years. He is the author of **Health Secrets for the 21st Century** (available at amazon.com) and a natural health products formulator with nutrstart.com



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MAR 3-APR 14

Andean Wisdom Teachings with Traditional healer Jhaimy Alvarez-Acosta from Cusco, Peru. Workshops, evening talks & healing work. Ph: 778-279-7234 www.childrenofthe7rays.com

MAR 9 & 10-15

Kriya Yoga as taught by Swami Shree Yogi Satya. Mar. 9: Free intro workshop, 7:30-9:30PM, Vancouver Public Library, 350 W. Georgia St. Mar. 10-15: Kriyayoga Program, Granville Island Hotel. Details: www.kriyayoga-yogisatyam.org, kriyayogavancouver@gmail.com

MAR 9-11

Introduction to Hand Reflexology commences Certificate Weekend Training Course. Introduction 7:30PM, \$10; Course \$395. Pacific Institute of Reflexology (604) 875-8818, www.pacificreflexology.com

MAR 10

Lu Jong: Tibetan Healing Yoga: Learn the Five Elements Movements of Tantrayana. Prana Yoga College, 1-4PM, \$40. farrah@lujong.org, www.lujong.org

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MAR 30

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MAR 30-APR 1

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Putting the love in revolution

On March 17, it will be six months since the beginning of Occupy

Wall Street and the subsequent cascade of grassroots occupations that followed across the Western world. Two local filmmakers who have been documenting the Occupy movement – from the Arab Spring, through Zuccotti Park to the Vancouver Art Gallery – are philoso-



A chastened Conrad Black opines on *Payback*. Photo courtesy Jeffrey Salter.

pher-filmmaker Velcrow Ripper and Port Moody-based Ian MacKenzie. Their online series of inspirational thought pieces and vignettes captures the diversity and idealism of the Occupy movement in its most intoxicating form. The pieces are just the appetizers for the main course, *Occupy Love*, which is the third documentary feature in a trilogy. It started with the award-winning *Scared Sacred*, in which Velcrow Ripper tried to find hope in the ground zeros of the world; subsequently, in *Fierce Light* he recognized the awesome potency of non-violent protest and *Occupy Love*, he says, will answer the question "How are the economic and ecological crises we are facing today a great love story?"

The film is due for theatrical release later this year, but the film's gestation has been a shared social media activity. *Occupy Love* just raised \$53,000 through the crowd-funding website indiegogo.com to help complete the film and its ideas have been seeded in pithy, short videos. Check out *Occupy Wall Street – The Revolution Is Love* (it's only five minutes) where MacKenzie melds an articulate monologue by *Sacred Economics* author Charles Eisenstein with intriguing visuals of Occupy participants. It's a wake-up call. Our monetarist system is failing us. "What we want to create is the more beautiful world that our hearts tell us is possible. A sacred world," says Eisenstein.

Eisenstein's latest, the 13-minute *Sacred Economics* (online from March 1), elaborates more on his thesis that we are evolving a new, holistic "story of self" in our relationship with others and the planet, having realized that aggressive individualism and the commodification of nature and community are a source of loneliness and unhappiness. Our monetarist system weakens, reduces and impoverishes us. "We're nearing the end of growth," he adds. "That's why the crisis that we have today won't go away."

I'm not sure how much it resonates with Jennifer Baichwal's *Payback* (out on March 23), which is based on Margaret Atwood's 2008 Massey Lectures book *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth* (www.cbc.ca/ideas/episodes/massey-lectures/) I haven't seen the film yet, but with local ecological footprint inventor Bill Rees featured among the five separate stories, the debt in question is clearly not just a financial affair.

With hearings on the Northern Gateway pipeline joint review panel underway, it's also a good time to revisit the 45-minute *Spoil* (www.ilcp.com, http://vimeo.com/19582018). The film follows a team from the International League of Conservation Photographers and members of the Gitga'at Nation in Hartley Bay, as they gather imagery and stories about the ecologically rich Great Bear Rainforest to share with the world, in particular, the elusive white-coated, spirit bear. It's abundantly clear why oil tankers must have no place here.

Finally, the director of *Einsatzgruppen*, Michael Prazan, is guest speaker for his lauded, three-hour investigation into Nazi death squads (March 11, 1PM, www.vjff.org).

Robert Alstead writes at www.2020Vancouver.com

Time for change at the Federal Reserve

How Wall Street & the Fed fleeced the U.S.

As a result of the greed, recklessness and illegal behaviour on Wall Street, the American people have experienced the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. Millions of Americans, through no fault of their own, have lost their jobs, homes, life savings and the ability to send their kids to college. Small businesses have been unable to get the credit they need to expand their businesses and credit is still extremely tight. Wages, as a share of national income, are now at the lowest level since the Great Depression and the number of Americans living in poverty is at an all-time high.

Meanwhile, when small-business owners were being turned down for loans at private banks and millions of Americans were being kicked out of their homes, the Federal Reserve provided the largest taxpayer-financed bailout in the history of the world to Wall Street and to too-big-to-fail institutions, with virtually no strings attached.

Over two years ago, I asked Ben Bernanke, chairman of the Federal Reserve, a few simple questions I thought the American people had a right to know: Who got money through the Fed bailout? How much did they receive? What were the terms of this assistance?

Incredibly, the chairman of the Fed refused to answer these fundamental questions about how trillions of taxpayer dollars were being spent. The American people are finally getting answers to these questions, thanks to an amendment I included in the Dodd-Frank financial reform bill which required the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to audit and investigate conflicts of interest at the Fed. Those answers raise grave questions about the Federal Reserve and how it operates – and whose interests it serves.

As a result of these GAO reports, we learned the Federal Reserve provided a jaw-dropping \$16 trillion in total financial assistance to every major financial institution in the country as well as a number of corporations, wealthy individuals and central banks throughout the world.

The GAO also revealed that many of the people who serve as directors of the 12 Federal Reserve Banks come from the exact same financial institutions that the Fed is in charge of regulating. Further, the GAO found that at least 18 current and former Fed board members were affiliated with banks and companies that received emergency loans from the Federal Reserve during the financial crisis. In other words, the people “regulating” the banks were the exact same people who were being “regulated.” Talk about the fox guarding the henhouse.

The emergency response from the Fed appears to have created two systems of government in America: one for Wall Street and another for everyone else. While the rich and powerful were “too big to fail” and were given an endless supply of cheap credit, ordinary Americans, by the tens of millions, were allowed to fail. They

lost their homes. They lost their jobs. They lost their life savings. And they lost their hope for the future. This is not what American democracy is supposed to look like. It is time for change at the Fed – real change.

Among the GAO’s key findings is that the Fed lacks a comprehensive system to deal with conflicts of interest, despite the serious potential for abuse. According to the GAO, the Fed actually provided conflict of interest waivers to employees and private contractors so they could keep investments in the same financial institutions and corporations that were given emergency loans.

The GAO has detailed instance after instance of top executives of corporations and financial institu-



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tions using their influence as Federal Reserve directors to financially benefit their firms, and, in at least one instance, themselves.

For example, the CEO of JP Morgan Chase served on the New York Fed’s board of directors at the same time his bank received more than \$390 billion in financial assistance from the Fed. Moreover, JP Morgan Chase served as one of the clearing banks for the Fed’s emergency lending programs.

Getting this type of disclosure was not easy. Wall Street and the Federal Reserve fought it every step of the way. But, as difficult as it was to lift the veil of secrecy at the Fed, it will be even harder to reform the Fed so that it serves the needs of all Americans and not just Wall Street. But that is exactly what we have to do.

To get this process started, I have asked some of the leading economists in this country to serve on an advisory committee to provide Congress with legislative options to reform the Federal Reserve.

Here are some of the questions I have asked this advisory committee to explore:

1. How can we structurally reform the Fed to make our nation’s central bank a more democratic institution responsive to the needs of ordinary Americans and end conflicts of interest and increase transparency? What are the best practices that central banks in other countries have developed we can learn from? Compared with central banks in Europe, Canada and Australia, the GAO found the Federal Reserve does not do a good

job in disclosing potential conflicts of interest and other essential elements of transparency.

2. At a time when 16.5 percent of our people are unemployed or under-employed, how can we strengthen the Federal Reserve’s full-employment mandate and ensure the Fed conducts monetary policy to achieve maximum employment? When Wall Street was on the verge of collapse, the Federal Reserve acted with a fierce sense of urgency to save the financial system. We need the Fed to act with the same boldness to combat the unemployment crisis.

3. The Federal Reserve has a responsibility to ensure the safety and soundness of financial institutions and to contain systemic risks in financial markets. Given the top six financial institutions in the country now have assets equivalent to 65 percent of our GDP – more than \$9 trillion – is there any reason why this extraordinary concentration of ownership should not be broken up? Should a bank that is “too big to fail” be allowed to exist?

4. The Federal Reserve has the responsibility to protect the credit rights of consumers. At a time when credit card issuers are charging millions of Americans interest rates of 25 percent or more, should policy options be established to ensure the Federal Reserve and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau protect consumers against predatory lending, usury and exorbitant fees in the financial services industry?

5. At a time when the dream of homeownership has turned into the nightmare of foreclosure for too many Americans, what role should the Federal Reserve be playing in providing relief to homeowners who are underwater on their mortgages and in combating the foreclosure crisis and making housing more affordable?

6. At a time when the US has the most inequitable distribution of wealth and income of any major country and the greatest gap between the very rich and everyone else since 1928, what policies can be established at the Federal Reserve which reduces income and wealth inequality in the US?

Given the growth of the Occupy Wall Street movement and the concerns of millions of Americans about Wall Street, we now have a unique opportunity to make significant changes to one of the most powerful and secretive agencies of the federal government. One thing is abundantly clear: Americans deserve a Federal Reserve that works for them, not just for the CEOs on Wall Street. ◀



Bernard “Bernie” Sanders is the United States Senator from Vermont and the former mayor of Burlington, Vermont.

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